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*1-file 1-SOURCED*Yugoslavia: Party Plans Organizational ChangesSUMMARY

The Yugoslav Communist Party is planning reforms of the post-Tito political machinery at its 13th Congress to be held on 25-28 June. The changes, the outlines of which have emerged at recent Party Central Committee plenums, include a modest strengthening of central authority, an emphasis on more democratic procedures, and a toning down of some of the more extreme features of the rotational leadership system devised by Tito. The reforms follow several years of sharp debate and attempt to reconcile pressures from competing interest groups. They will probably incrementally improve efficiency while still leaving most power with the regional bosses.

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This memorandum was prepared by [] Southeast European Branch, East European Division, Office of European Analysis, with coordination from the Office of Central Reference. It was requested by Paula Dobrianski, Director of European and Soviet Affairs, National Security Council. Comments and questions are welcome and should be addressed to [] Chief, East European Division, EURA [].

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The Quest for Change

Organizational change has been a staple theme of the Yugoslav Communist system since its inception after World War II, as Tito sought to adapt political structures to shifting needs and policies. Nonetheless, the 13th Party Congress this June, the second congress since Tito's death in 1980, follows a debate over institutional reform heated even by Yugoslav standards. The impetus for changing the post-Tito system has been the seeming paralysis of the collective leadership in the face of declining living standards, a \$20 billion hard currency debt, and sharpened tensions among the many ethnic groups. []

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The movement for change has been impeded by overlapping, often conflicting demands put forth by the country's many political factions. These factions represent well-entrenched pressure groups motivated by differing ethnic, economic, and ideological interests. Centralists from the influential republic of Serbia have pressed for a return to Belgrade of some of the power that has devolved to the regions during the past 20 years. Regionalists have insisted on keeping the decentralized status quo. But ideological hardliners among them--mostly from Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina--have called for restoring to the party some of its lost influence. And both they and the rationally-minded Slovenes have urged streamlining top party bodies to improve efficiency. Meanwhile, liberal party members have demanded more intra-party democracy to wrest power from what they see as a stultified and incompetent elite. []

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The factions had aired their views--and ended up in a virtual standoff--both in a stormy 9-month partywide debate in 1984 and 1985 and an even lengthier specially commissioned government study, which produced a book-length document earlier this year. Despite this stalemate, the regime since last year has begun to respond ad hoc to many of these pressures. The party leadership has been asserting itself more forcefully toward both some of the independent-minded regional leaderships and the federal parliament. And some of the regional party and government bodies have introduced more democratic methods promoted by liberal reformers. []

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Reforms at Congress

The party congress this June and the regional congresses leading up to it are likely to ratify a series of organizational reforms designed to address the demands of the various factions. The reforms--most of them now before the party for debate as statutory changes--will strengthen somewhat central party authority, introduce a few democratic trappings, and make less disruptive the system of rotational leadership devised by Tito to prevent a single person from accumulating too much

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power. Following are highlights of expected reforms:

Smaller Central Committee: The Central Committee will be streamlined by nearly one-quarter to 129 members, the smallest it has been since it was reinstated at the 10th Congress in 1974. The decision, taken at a party plenum last November, is in line with demands by party moderates to make the Central Committee a more manageable and effective counterweight to the 23-member Presidium, the top executive body. Advocates of regional rights also seem to support the move. They apparently hope that the regions will have more control over federal decisions if they are made in the Central Committee, which has tended to use consensus, than in the Presidium, where majority rule usually prevails. Proposals were defeated for an even smaller Central Committee and the replacement of the Presidium with a weak administrative unit. The new Central Committee will retain strict proportional representation by regions--16 seats for each republic and 11 each for the two provinces and army party organization.

Central Committee Elections: The election of Central Committee members will be changed to reduce at least nominally the power of regional chieftains. In past years the congress rubber-stamped the regions' choices for their quotas of slots. This June, by contrast, the congress will vote by secret ballot on the regional lists, with candidates failing to achieve a majority vote being struck off and replaced. The new procedure may eliminate some of the more outspoken, parochially oriented regional delegates. Nonetheless, regional leaders still will control choosing replacement candidates and they will horse-trade in advance to ensure that most of their slates are approved.

Special Regional Congresses: The central party leadership will be given a new tool to coerce regional leaderships to implement unpopular decisions, an endemic problem in post-Tito Yugoslavia. Under a proposed statutory change, the Central Committee will be able to convoke special congresses of regional party organizations when policy implementation is blocked. The current party statute allows only the regional parties to call such gatherings. If the change is adopted, the Central Committee will probably use this new authority only gingerly, partly because it still lacks means to assure that such a meeting would adopt the appropriate decisions. Nonetheless the change may help reduce minority obstructionism, such as the behavior of the Croatian and Slovene leaderships last year in a dispute over allocating foreign exchange.

Democratic Centralism: The party statute will probably be amended to strengthen at least formally democratic centralism, a Leninist principle designed to ensure implementation of decisions reached by majority vote in central bodies. The party Statutory Commission head, Budimir Vukasinovic, at a plenum on 14 February

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said that the new statute would be more explicit than the previous one on this score, although he cautioned that statutory changes alone would not change behavior.

Secret Balloting:

the draft party statute now being discussed calls for elections by secret ballot throughout the party. Election of the Central Committee until now has been exempted from this requirement. The procedure could promote democratic norms in the party by freeing delegates from pressures by their superiors, although past evidence suggests that party bosses would still control the machinery.

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Multiple Candidates: The use of multiple candidates within the one-party system will be encouraged in federal and regional party elections. According to the current proposal, the regional congresses will have competitive, multiple candidate elections in putting forth their slates for the national party Central Committee. A plenum in November implied that multiple candidates may be used even by the Central Committee in selecting the Presidium. In practice, however, the procedure probably will be used haphazardly and have only a marginal democratizing effect. Serbia in late February sheepishly decided not to use it in choosing its new party leadership when no opposition candidates would run against the choices of the republican bosses. In Croatia, where the practice has been applied, it has done little to wrest power from political brokers and has been greeted with widespread public skepticism.

Longer Terms of Office: The lower rungs of the party seem determined to free themselves from the system of frequent leadership change now in effect. Tito had introduced the system in the Presidium in 1978 to prevent any one of his successors from trying to take charge after his death, and his move was quickly duplicated down to the lowest levels, often with disruptive effects. The national party statute allows the regions to set their own policies. In recent months many of them and their governmental counterparts have begun to pave the way to extend office terms through their own statutory or constitutional amendments. There has been little sentiment, however, to exempt the national party chief from the current practice of annual rotations. Despite initial skepticism that such a complex system could last, most Yugoslavs now seem to agree it has helped keep the peace among the regions.

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Outlook

The reforms will probably have at least a marginal effect on the way the political system works. They will incrementally increase central authority, encourage a few more democratic trappings for the authoritarian, one-party system, and make more

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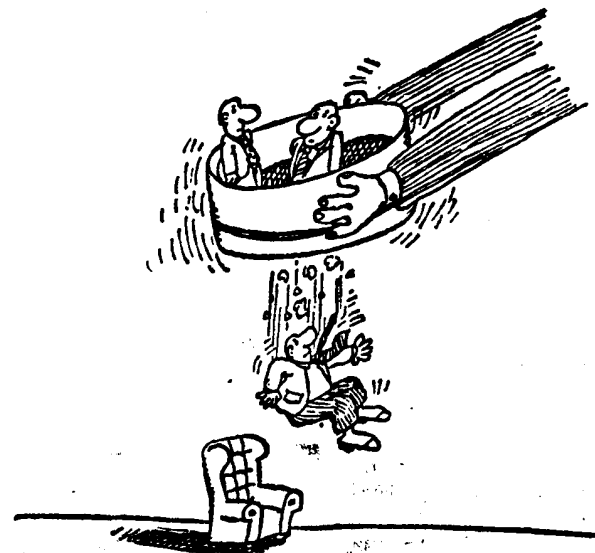


The Party Central Committee, shown above during a break at its last plenum on 21 February, will be cut back to 129 members and given some added authority. In theory the highest body between party congresses, the Central Committee will still have to contend with powerful regional factions and a 23-member Presidium, the top executive body.

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"Candidates": Cartoon in the semi-official Belgrade daily Borba on 25 February shows new stress on using multiple candidates in elections. The procedure, intended to introduce earmarks of democracy, has won wide support. But so far most of the sifting has been done by the powers that be, not the grassroots.

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rational the practice of rotational leadership left by Tito. The drive to give the Central Committee greater authority may put it increasingly at loggerheads with the Presidium, which since Tito's death has had more and more difficulty getting the Central Committee to approve its positions. None of the factions will view the changes as an ideal or permanent answer to its concerns, and debates will continue over many of the same issues that dominated the most recent inter-congress period. Nonetheless, they may form the basis for a short-term modus vivendi. [redacted]

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